

(10) **Patent No.:** US 9,320,392 B2
(45) **Date of Patent:** Apr. 26, 2016

- | | | | | |
|--------------|------|---------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 2,579,258 | A * | 12/1951 | Heckert | 99/349 |
| 2,674,793 | A * | 4/1954 | Dominick | 294/3 |
| 2,800,714 | A * | 7/1957 | Evans | 30/114 |
| 3,233,325 | A * | 2/1966 | Perry | 30/129 |
| 3,348,272 | A * | 10/1967 | Germani | 24/563 |
| 3,492,039 | A * | 1/1970 | Chmela | 294/7 |
| 4,691,440 | A | 9/1987 | Ushigome | |
| 5,373,640 | A | 12/1994 | Cordeiro | |
| 5,403,052 | A * | 4/1995 | Lampron | 294/7 |
| 6,442,846 | B1 | 9/2002 | Michael | |
| 6,536,114 | B2 | 3/2003 | Lawless | |
| 6,851,574 | B1 * | 2/2005 | Traynor | A47G 21/04
30/324 |
| 7,628,432 | B2 | 12/2009 | Flather | |
| 7,716,842 | B2 * | 5/2010 | Sumner-Trivisani .. | A47G 21/02
16/422 |
| D675,886 | S | 2/2013 | Gates | |
| 2003/0034662 | A1 * | 2/2003 | Wilson | 294/7 |
| 2006/0053638 | A1 * | 3/2006 | Sumner-Trivisani .. | A47G 21/02
30/298.4 |
| 2008/0030034 | A1 | 2/2008 | Balaciano | |
| 2009/0217532 | A1 | 9/2009 | Cantu | |

* cited by examiner

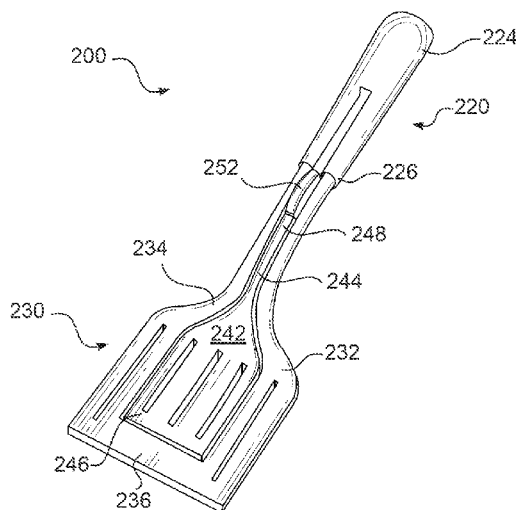
Primary Examiner — Paul T Chin

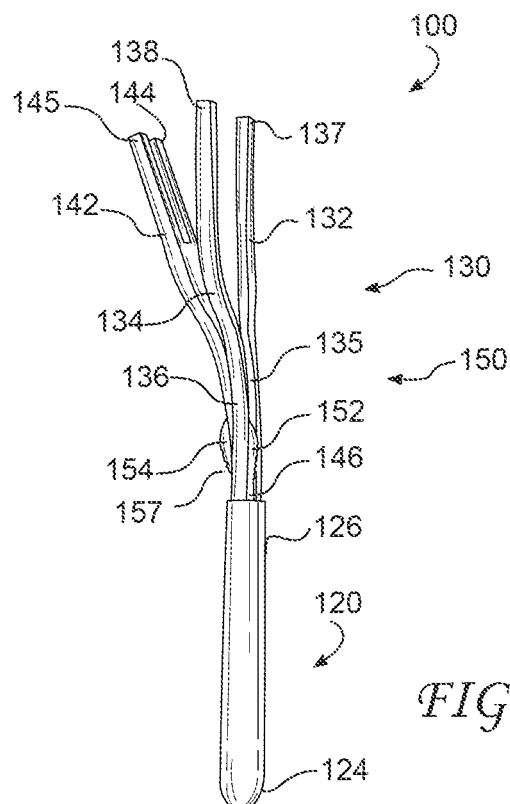
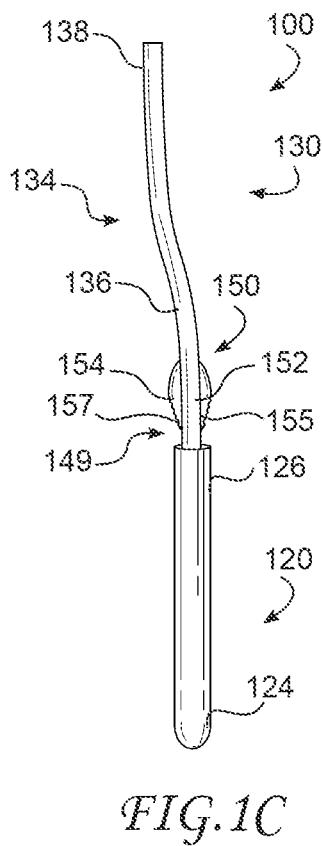
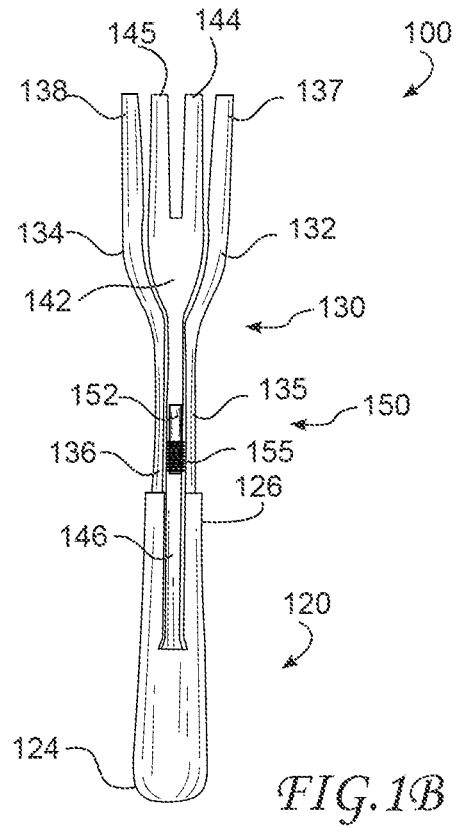
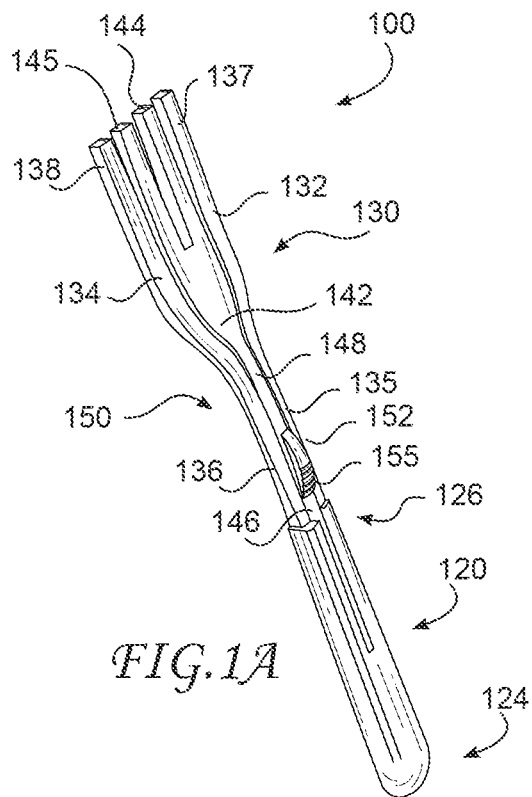
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Law Offices of Kamran Fattahi

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A utensil for other use in the kitchen or similar venues configured with two side portions and a flexible middle portion formed to bend away from the adjacent side portions. The utensil includes a handle and at least one finger tab extending above and below the middle portion that allow the user to push the middle portion above or below the adjacent side portions and to lock utensil in an open position. The side and middle portions may be configured as a plurality of fork tines or the side and middle portions may be configured as substantially square (rectangular) supports resembling a spatula. Alternatively, the utensil is configured as two separate "L" shaped portions. The combination of the handle, the finger tabs and relatively movable portions allow a user of the utensil to grip food or other items with the utensil.

9 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets





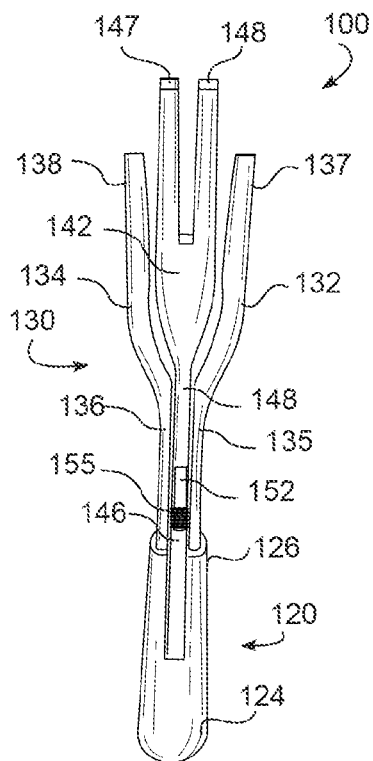


FIG. 1E

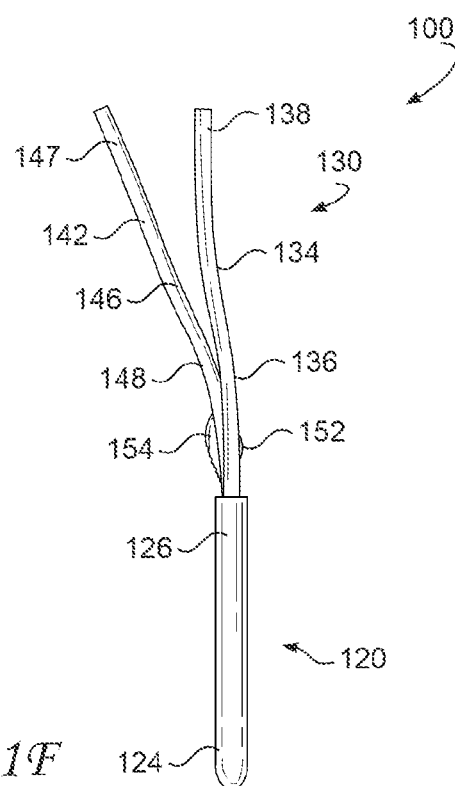


FIG. 1F

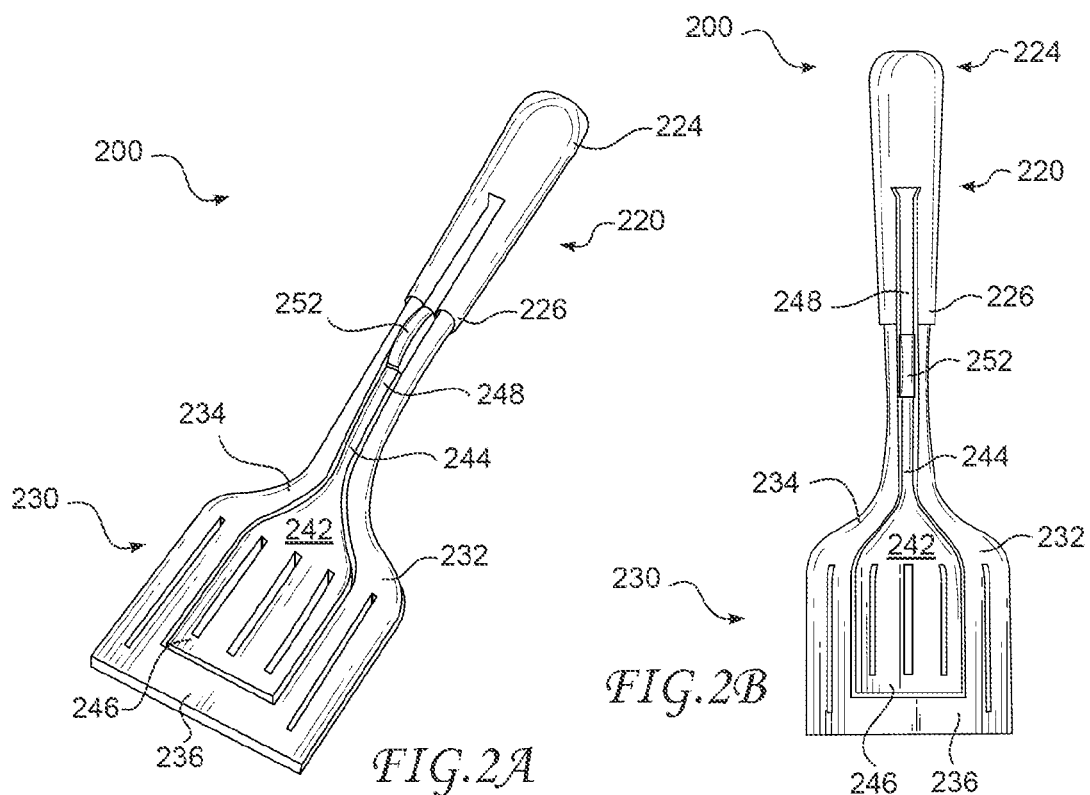
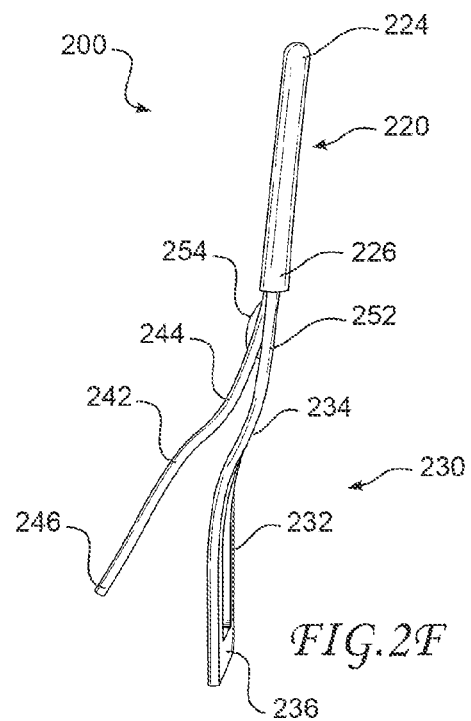
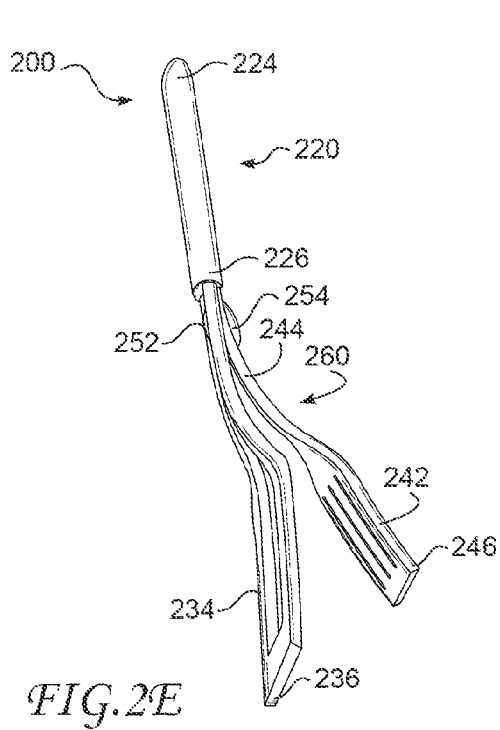
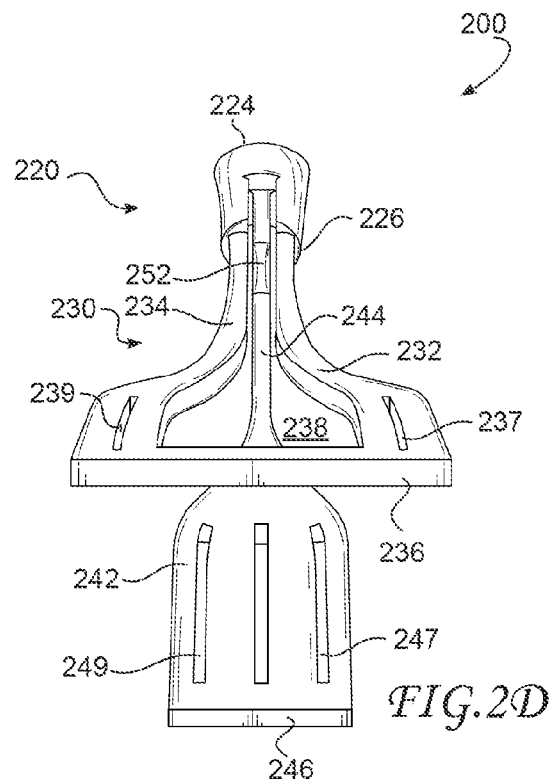
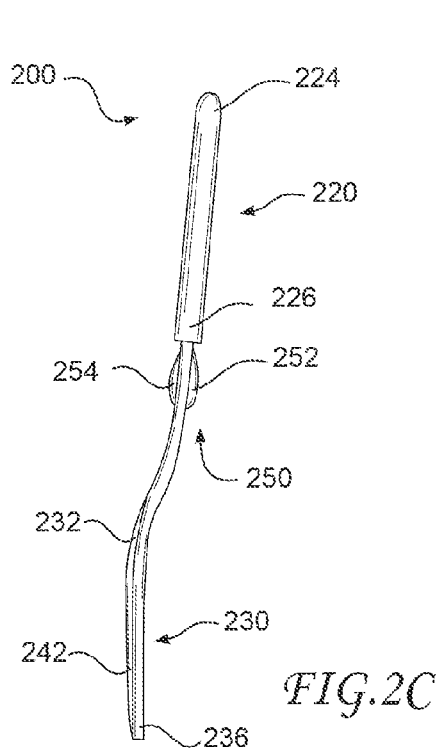
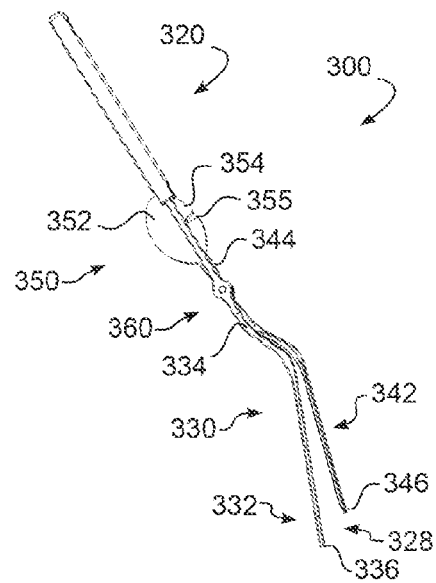
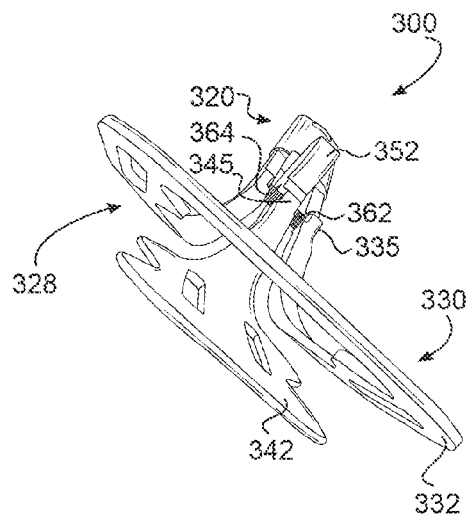
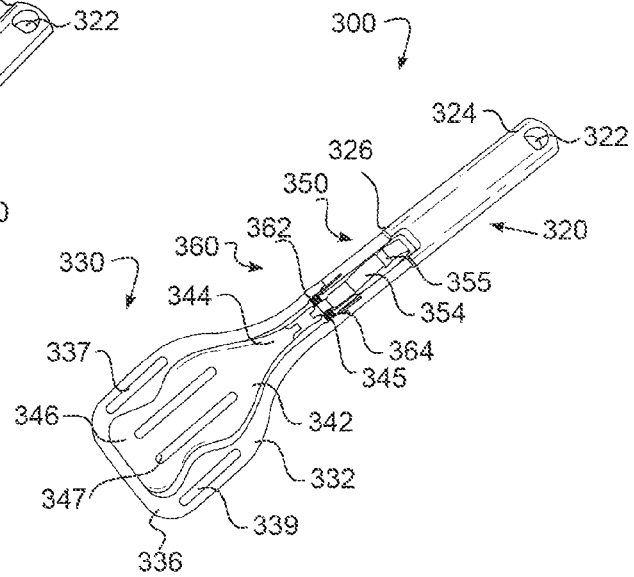
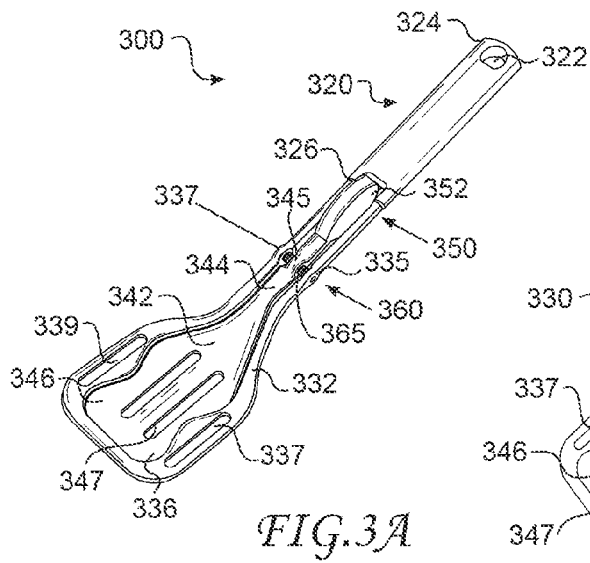


FIG. 2A

FIG. 2B





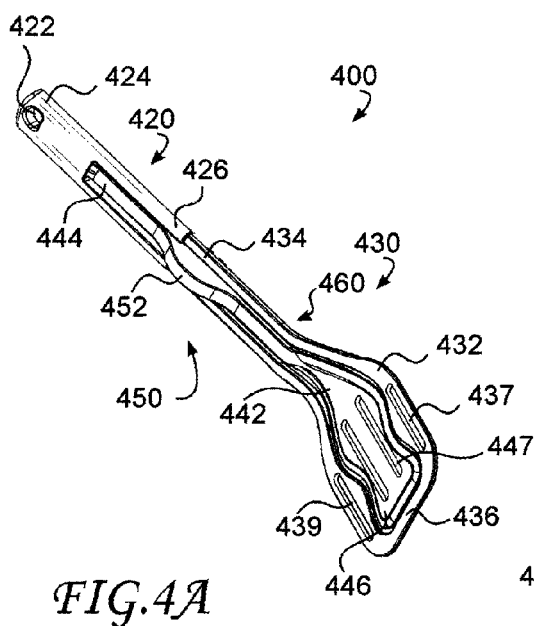


FIG. 4A

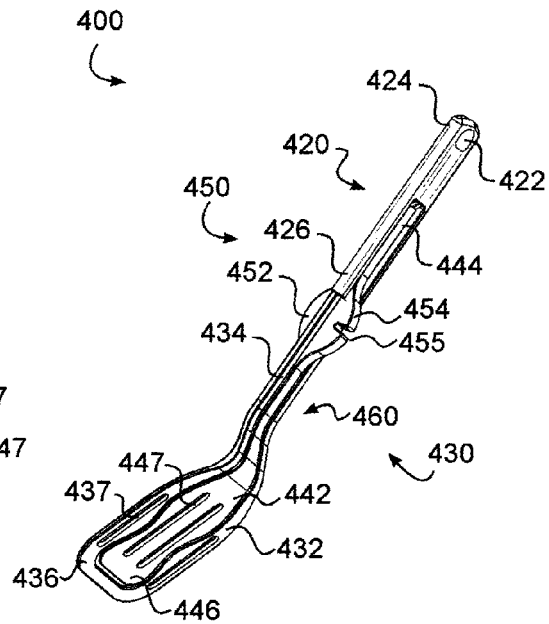


FIG. 4B

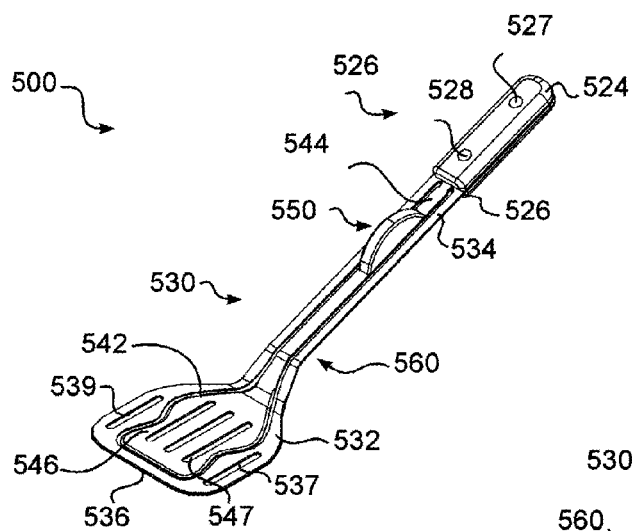


FIG. 5A

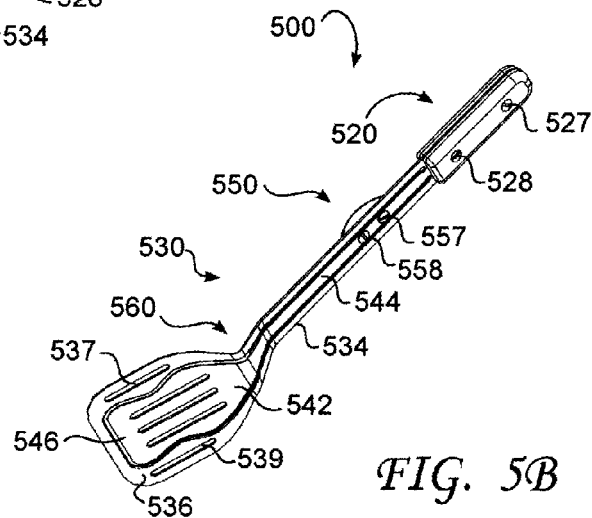


FIG. 5B

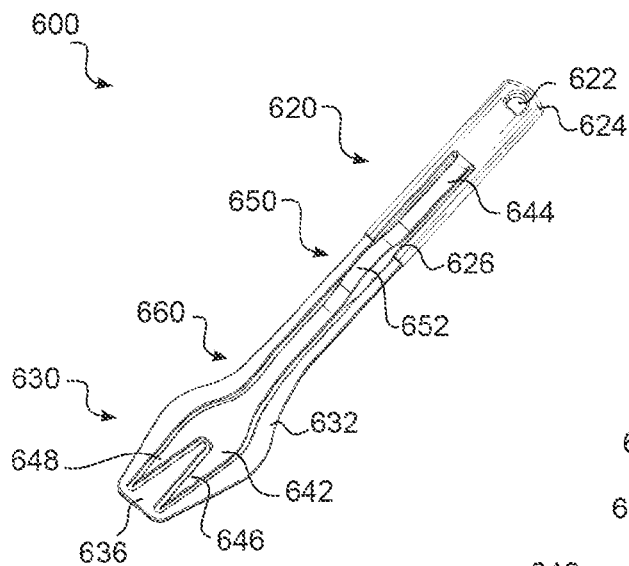


FIG. 6A

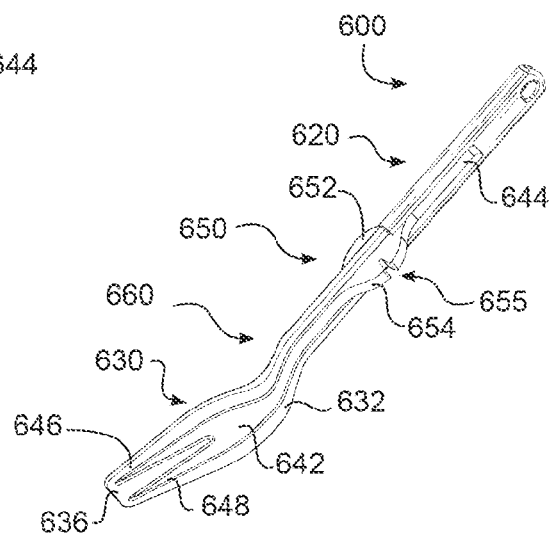


FIG. 6B

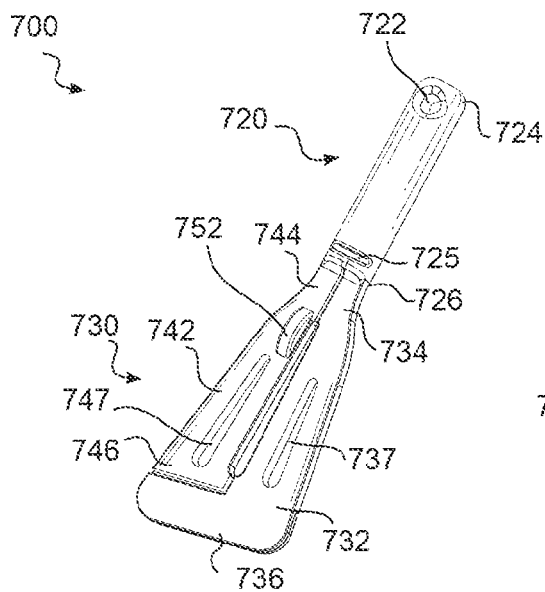


FIG. 7A

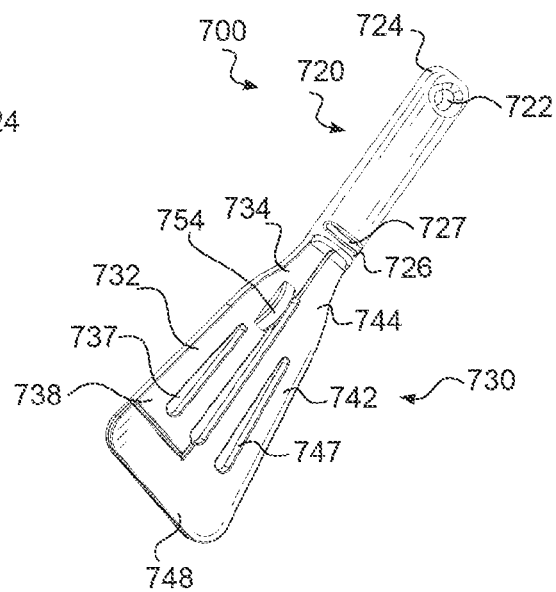


FIG. 7B

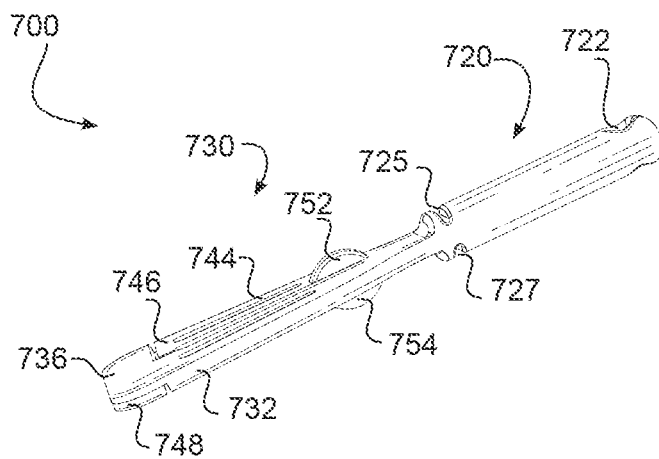


FIG. 7C

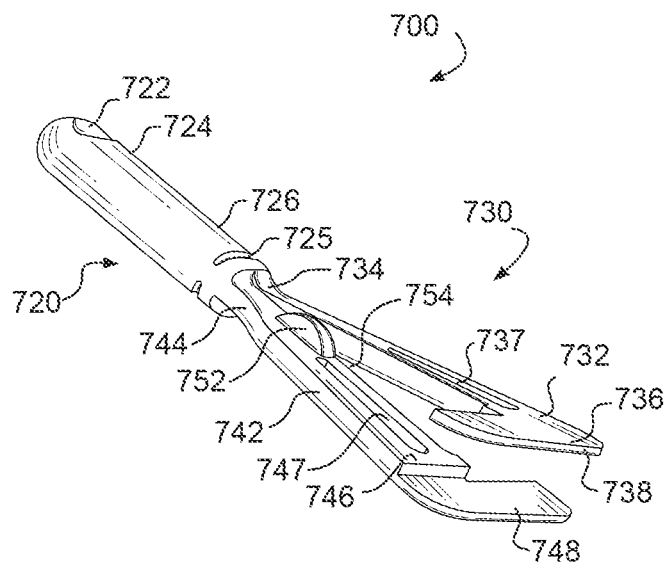


FIG. 7D

1

UTENSIL WITH GRIP FEATURE**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION**

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 61/860,656 filed Jul. 31, 2013, the content of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The apparatus of the present invention is directed to a utensil for grasping items, and more particularly for grasping food between movable middle and side portions of the utensil.

Known food utensils vary greatly to manage food for consumption. For example, known utensils are formed from equally shaped and sized sticks with tapered or blunt ends (“chopsticks”). Other known utensils include a fork, a knife and a spoon. Hybrid utensils include a so-called “spork,” which combines a fork and a spoon; and a so-called “knork,” which combines the tines of a fork and the cutting edge of a knife.

Another known multi-functional cooking utensil is formed from a spatula tool, a tongs tool and fork tool integrated as the one device. One aspect of that multi-functional cooking utensil includes the fork tool combined with a spatula head, having a closed position forming a spatula, and open position forming a pair of tongs.

Such utensils are difficult for the inexperienced user to grasp and hold food and other items.

Accordingly, what has been needed and heretofore unavailable is an improved utensil that overcomes the deficiencies of existing utensil that can be easily be manipulated to grasp food or other items. The present invention disclosed herein satisfies these and other needs.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The apparatus of the present invention is directed to a utensil for eating food and to other uses in the kitchen or similar venues. In one embodiment, the utensil of the present invention is configured as a fork having two elongated side portions (tines) and having a flexible middle portion formed to bend away from adjacent side portions. The middle portion may be configured with two or more elongated portions (tines). Alternatively, the side and middle portions may be configured as substantially square (rectangular) supports, including elongated cutouts or slits, thereby resembling a spatula. A further embodiment is configured to separate into two “L” shaped portions.

The utensil includes a handle and at least one finger tab that extends above and below the flexible middle portion. The finger tab allows the user of the utensil to push the middle portion above or below (side to side) the adjacent side portions. The finger tab may be slidably disposed on the flexible middle portion so that the finger tab may be moved into the handle to lock the relative positions of the middle and side portions. The combination of the handle, the finger tab and relatively movable middle and side portions allow a user of the utensil to grip food or other items between the middle and side portions.

In one embodiment, the utensil of the present invention is configured in the shape of a fork having a handle and two elongated side portions attached to the handle that form prongs (tines). The fork-shaped utensil includes a flexible middle portion attached to the handle that is positioned between the side portions. A tab (fulcrum) is configured on

2

the middle portion and formed to bend the middle portion away from adjacent side portions. The tab on the middle portion may be configured to move into the two elongated side portions so as to lock the position of the middle portion relative to the position of the side portions. The middle portion may be configured with two or more elongated portions (tines).

In another embodiment, the utensil of the present invention is configured in the shape of a spatula having a handle and a side portion having an upper elongate section attached to the handle and lower rectangular section formed with a central open portion. The spatula-shaped utensil further includes a middle portion having an upper elongate section attached to the handle and a lower rectangular section positioned within the central open portion of the lower rectangular section of the side portion of the spatula. The upper elongate section of the middle portion includes a tab (fulcrum) configured to bend the middle portion away from side portion and lock the two portions apart. The tab may include a slit for resting on the side of a frying pan (skillet) or other cooking utensil. One embodiment of the spatula-shaped utensil includes a spring mechanism configured in the elongate sections so as to bias the middle lower rectangular section within the central open portion of the lower rectangular section of the side portion. The rectangular portions may be configured with horizontal and/or vertical slits for fluid drainage through the spatula.

In a further embodiment, the utensil of the present invention is configured having two overlapping “L”-shaped portions attached to a handle. The first overlapping portion includes an upper elongate section connected to the handle and a tab (fulcrum) configured on the elongate section to bias (move) the “L”-shaped portion relative to the handle. The first overlapping portion is further configured with a lower horizontally extending section to form the “L”-shape with the elongate section. Similarly, the second overlapping portion includes an upper elongate section connected to the handle and a tab configured on the elongate section to bias (move) the “L”-shaped portion relative to the handle and the first “L”-shaped portion. The second overlapping portion is also configured with a second horizontally extending section (forming an “L”-shape) and is positioned adjacent the horizontally extending section of the first “L”-shaped portion. The horizontally extending sections of the two overlapping portions may be configured with at least one elongated slit and a gap may be configured between the two overlapping portions for fluid drainage.

Other features and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, which illustrate, by way of example, the features of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1A is a perspective view of a utensil of the present invention configured as a fork.

FIG. 1B is a top plan view of the fork-shaped utensil depicted in FIG. 1A.

FIG. 1C is a side plan view of the fork-shaped utensil depicted in FIGS. 1A and 1B.

FIG. 1D is a perspective view of the fork-shaped utensil depicted in FIGS. 1A and 1B showing a middle portion of the utensil deployed away from side portions of the utensil.

FIG. 1E is a top plan view of a fork-shaped utensil in accordance with the present invention depicting a middle portion of the utensil having tines longer than tines on the outside of the utensil.

3

FIG. 1F is a side plan view of the fork-shaped utensil depicted in FIG. 1E showing the middle portion of the utensil deployed away from side portions of the utensil.

FIG. 2A is a perspective view of a utensil of the present invention configured as a spatula.

FIG. 2B is a top plan view of the spatula utensil depicted in FIG. 2A.

FIG. 2C is a side plan view of the spatula utensil depicted in FIGS. 2A and 2B.

FIG. 2D is a front perspective view of the spatula utensil depicted in FIGS. 2A and 2B showing a middle portion of the utensil deployed away from side and end portions of the utensil.

FIG. 2E is a side perspective view of the spatula utensil depicted in FIGS. 2A and 2B showing a middle portion of the utensil deployed away from side and end portions of the utensil.

FIG. 2F is a side plan view of a spatula utensil of the spatula utensil depicted in FIGS. 2A and 2B showing a middle portion of the utensil deployed away from side and end portions of the utensil.

FIG. 3A is a top perspective view of a utensil of the present invention configured as a spatula having a pivot mechanism.

FIG. 3B is a bottom perspective view of the pivoting utensil depicted in FIG. 3A.

FIG. 3C is a front perspective view of the pivoting utensil depicted in FIGS. 3A and 3B showing a middle portion of the utensil deployed away from side and end portions of the utensil.

FIG. 3D is a side plan view of the pivoting utensil depicted in FIG. 3C.

FIG. 4A is a top perspective view of an alternative embodiment of a spatula utensil of the present invention configured from plastic in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 4B is a bottom perspective view of the plastic spatula utensil depicted in FIG. 4A.

FIG. 5A is a top perspective view of a utensil of the present invention configured as a metal spatula having a wooden handle.

FIG. 5B is a bottom perspective view of the metal spatula utensil depicted in FIG. 5A.

FIG. 6A is a top perspective view of an alternative embodiment of a fork-shaped utensil of the present invention configured in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 6B is a bottom perspective view of the fork-shaped spatula utensil depicted in FIG. 6A.

FIG. 7A is a top perspective view of a utensil of the present invention configured with two "L"-shaped gripping portions.

FIG. 7B is a bottom perspective view of the gripping utensil depicted in FIG. 7A.

FIG. 7C is a side perspective view of the pivoting utensil depicted in FIGS. 7A and 7B.

FIG. 7D is a front perspective view of the gripping utensil depicted in FIGS. 7A and 7B showing each "L"-shaped middle portion of the utensil deployed away from the other portion.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The apparatus of the present invention is generally directed to a utensil having a handle, side portions fixedly attached to the handle, a relatively movable, flexible middle portion fixedly attached to the handle, and a fulcrum tab. The fulcrum tab may be formed on or part of the middle portion extending away from the handle and disposed on either side (above and below, right and left) of the middle portion of the utensil. The fulcrum tab is configured to bend or push the middle portion

4

away from adjacent side portions in an upward or downward (side-to-side) direction. The fulcrum tab may be slidably disposed on the flexible middle portion so that the fulcrum tab may be moved into the handle to lock the relative positions of the middle and side portions. The combination of the handle, the finger tab and relatively movable middle and side portions allow a user of the utensil to grip food or other items between the middle and side portions. The side and middle portions may be configured as a plurality of elongated spikes forming a fork. Alternatively, the side and middle portions may be configured as substantially rectangular supports forming a spatula. In addition, the utensil may be formed with two "L"-shaped gripping portions.

Suitable materials of construction for the utensil of the present invention include natural materials (for example, various woods and bamboo), metals and alloys, plastics, rubbers, polymers, for example, polytetrafluoroethylene—PTFE, and other synthetic materials.

Turning now to the drawings, in which like reference numerals represent like or corresponding aspects of the drawings, and with particular reference to FIGS. 1A to 1D, the utensil **100** of the present invention is configured with a handle **120** having a first (top-upper) end portion **124** and a second (bottom-lower) end portion **126**. The utensil includes and a body portion **130** being configured with two elongated side portions **132**, **134**, each having a first (top-upper) end portion **135**, **136** and a second (bottom-lower) end portion **137**, **138**. The upper end portion of each side portion is attached to the handle at the lower end portion of the handle. The utensil further includes a flexible middle portion **142** having a first (top-upper) end portion **144** and a second (bottom-lower) end portion **146** attached to the second end portion of the handle and positioned between the side portions. As shown in FIGS. 1E and 1F, the tines **147**, **148** extending from the middle portion **142** may be longer than the tines **137**, **138** extending from the outer portions **132**, **134**.

The utensil of the present invention is further configured with a fulcrum (finger) tab **150** configured on the middle portion **142** proximate the second end portion **126** of the handle **120**. A first (top-upper) portion **152** of the fulcrum extends from one side **148** of the middle portion and a second portion **154** of the fulcrum extends from a second side **149** of the middle portion. As shown in FIGS. 1D and 1F, the fulcrum tab is configured to bend or push the middle portion away from the adjacent side portions **122**, **124** in an upward or downward (side to side) direction. The fulcrum may be configured on one or both sides with ridges **155**, **157** to assist the fulcrum to lock the side and middle portions apart. The fulcrum tab may be configured to slide or otherwise be moved on the flexible middle portion towards or away from second end portion of the handle. Moving the fulcrum tab into the second end portion of the handle locks the relative positions of the middle and side portions of the utensil. The combination of the handle, the finger tab and relatively movable middle and side portions allow a user of the utensil to grip food or other items between the middle and side portions.

Referring now to FIGS. 2A to 2F, an alternative embodiment of the utensil **200** of the present invention is configured with a handle **220** having a first (top-upper) end portion **224** and a second (bottom-lower) end portion **226**. The bottom-lower portion **230** of the utensil includes two elongate body side sections **232**, **234** extending from the bottom end portion of the handle and a distal (bottom) end section **236** joining the two side sections distal (away) from the handle to form a rectangular body; thereby creating a spatula-shaped utensil. The side portions and distal (bottom-lower) end portion form a central opening **238** (FIG. 2D). The utensil further includes

a flexible middle portion **242** having a first (top-upper) elongate section **244** and a second (bottom-lower) end rectangular section **246**. The upper elongate section of the middle portion is attached to the lower end portion **226** of the handle **220** and is positioned between the elongate body side sections **232**, **234**. The bottom rectangular section of the middle portion is positioned adjacent the distal end section **236** of the side portion and within the central opening **238** of the body. The side and middle and distal end portions may be configured with a plurality of elongated slits (cutouts) **237**, **239**, **247**, **249**, thereby forming a spatula having drainage.

The spatula-shaped utensil **200** of the present invention is further configured with a fulcrum (finger) tab **250** configured on the middle portion **242** proximate the lower end portion **226** of the handle **220**. A first (top-upper) portion **252** of the fulcrum extends from the top (upper) side of the middle portion and a second portion **254** of the fulcrum extends from the bottom (lower) side of the middle portion. With reference to FIGS. **2D**, **2E** and **2F**, the fulcrum tab is configured to bend or push the middle portion **242** away from (through) the elongate side sections **232**, **234** and distal end portion **246** in an upward or downward (side to side) direction. The fulcrum tab may be configured to slide or otherwise be moved on the flexible middle portion towards or away from second end portion of the handle. Moving the fulcrum tab into the elongate sections of the side portion locks the relative positions of the middle and side portions of the utensil. The combination of the handle, the finger tab and relatively movable middle and side portions allow a user of the utensil to grip food or other items between the middle and side and distal end portions.

Referring now to FIGS. **3A** to **3D**, an alternative embodiment of the utensil **300** of the present invention is configured with a handle **320** having a first (top-upper) end portion **324** and a second (bottom-lower) end portion **326**. The bottom-lower portion **330** of the utensil includes a body outside portion **332** extending from the lower end portion of the handle. The outside portion is configured with an elongate section extending distal (away) from the handle, and configured with a rectangular distal end section **336**; thereby creating a spatula-shaped utensil. The body side portion and rectangular distal (bottom-lower) end portion form a central opening **328** (FIG. **3C**, **3D**). The utensil further includes a flexible middle portion **342** having an elongate (top-upper) end portion **344** and a rectangular (bottom-lower) end portion **346**. The upper elongate section of the middle portion is attached to the lower end portion **326** of the handle **320** and is positioned between the upper elongate section body and the rectangular distal end section **336** of the outside portion **332**, being within the central opening **328** of the body portion. The side and middle portions may be configured with a plurality of elongated slits (cutouts) **337**, **339**, **347**, thereby forming a spatula having drainage.

The spatula-shaped utensil **300** of the present invention is further configured with a fulcrum (finger) tab **350** configured on the middle portion **342** proximate the lower end portion **326** of the handle **320**. A first (top-upper) portion **352** of the fulcrum extends from the top (upper) side of the middle portion and a second portion **354** of the fulcrum extends from the bottom (lower) side of the middle portion. The fulcrum may be further configured with a slot **355** to sit on the edge of a frying pan (skillet) or other cooking utensil. With reference to FIGS. **3C** and **3D**, the fulcrum tab is configured to bend or push the middle portion **342** away from (through) the elongate sections of the outside portion **332** and its rectangular end portion **346** in a downward (side-to-side) direction. The fulcrum tab may be configured to slide or otherwise be moved

on the flexible middle portion towards or away from second end portion of the handle. Moving the fulcrum tab into an opening in the upper elongate section of the side portion **332** locks the relative positions of the middle and side portions of the utensil. The combination of the handle, the finger tab and relatively movable middle and side portions allow a user of the utensil to grip food or other items between the middle and side and distal end portions.

The relative movement of the side portion **332** and middle portion **342** of the utensil **300** may be aided by a spring-rod mechanism **360**, positioned within slots **335** and **337** formed in the side portion and a slot **345** formed within the middle portion. One or more springs **362**, **364** may be positioned on each side of the middle section slot (between the side section slots) to cause the middle section to be retained with the opening in the side portion **328** until moved using the fulcrum. The springs may be configured to return the middle portion within the opening **328** of the side portion when the fulcrum-lock mechanism is released by the user.

Referring now to FIGS. **4A** and **4B**, an alternative embodiment of the utensil **400** of the present invention is configured with a handle **420** having a top (upper) end portion **424** and a bottom (lower) end portion **426**. The upper end of the handle may be configured with a circular hole (cutout) **422** useful for hanging the utensil from a hook. The bottom (lower) portion **430** of the utensil includes an outside portion **432** extending from the lower end portion of the handle. The outside portion includes an upper elongate section **434** connected to and extending downwards (away) from the handle. The lower section of the outside portion of the utensil is formed with a rectangular bottom (lower) end section **436**. The utensil further includes a flexible middle portion **442** having an upper elongate section **444** and a rectangular bottom (lower) end section **446**. The upper elongate section of the middle portion is attached to the lower end portion **426** of the handle **420** and is positioned within the elongate section **434** of the outside portion. The elongate section of the outside portion and the elongate section of the middle portion are articulated or curved at the juncture **460** with the lower rectangular sections, thereby creating a spatula-shaped utensil. The lower rectangular outside section and lower rectangular middle section may be configured with one or more elongated slits (horizontal and/or vertical cutouts) **437**, **439**, **447** so as to provide liquid drainage from the spatula.

The spatula-shaped utensil **400** of the present invention is further configured with a fulcrum (finger) tab **450** configured on the upper elongate section **444** of the middle portion **442** proximate the lower end portion **426** of the handle **420**. A first portion **452** of the fulcrum extends from the top (upper) side of the elongate middle portion of the utensil and a second portion **454** of the fulcrum extends from the bottom (lower) side of the elongate middle portion. Moving the fulcrum tab into the opening in the elongate section **434** of the outside portion **432** locks the middle portion's lower rectangular section **446** away from the lower rectangular section **436** of the outside portion of the utensil. The fulcrum tab bottom section may further be configured with a slot **455** to sit on the edge of a frying pan (skillet) or other cooking utensil.

Referring now to FIGS. **5A** and **5B**, an alternative embodiment of the utensil **500** of the present invention is configured with a handle **520** having a top (upper) end portion **524** and a bottom (lower) end portion **526**. The bottom (lower) portion **530** of the utensil is attached to the handle by one or more screws or bolts **527**, **528**. The utensil lower portion in this embodiment is preferably made of metal and the handle is preferably made of wood. The lower portion includes an outside portion **532** extending from the lower end portion of

the handle. The outside portion includes an upper elongate section **534** connected to and extending downwards (away) from the handle. The lower section of the outside portion of the utensil is formed with a rectangular bottom (lower) end section **536**. The utensil further includes a flexible middle portion **542** having an upper elongate section **544** and a rectangular bottom (lower) end section **546**. The upper elongate section of the middle portion is formed within (cut from) the elongate outside section **534** of the outside portion. The elongate section of the outside portion and the elongate section of the middle portion are articulated or curved at the juncture **560** with the lower rectangular sections, thereby creating a spatula-shaped utensil. The lower rectangular outside section and lower rectangular middle section may be configured with one or more elongated slits (horizontal and/or vertical cut-outs) **537**, **539**, **547** so as to provide liquid drainage from the spatula.

The spatula-shaped utensil **500** of the present invention is further configured with a fulcrum (finger) tab **550** attached onto the upper elongate section **544** of the middle portion **542** proximate the lower end portion **526** of the handle **520**. The fulcrum may be attached to the elongate middle section by one or more screws **557**, **558**. Depressing the fulcrum bends the elongate middle portion and moves the lower middle rectangular section **546** downward and away from (separates) the outside rectangular section **536**. The top portion of the fulcrum may be configured to engage the upper elongate section **534** of the outside portion **532** to lock the separated position of the outside portion and the middle portion.

Referring now to FIGS. **6A** and **4B**, an alternative embodiment of the utensil **600** of the present invention is configured with a handle **620** having a top (upper) end portion **624** and a bottom (lower) end portion **626**. The upper end of the handle may be configured with a circular hole (cutout) **622** useful for hanging the utensil from a hook. The bottom (lower) portion **630** of the utensil includes an outside portion **632** extending from the lower end portion of the handle. The outside portion includes an upper elongate section **634** connected to and extending downwards (away) from the handle. The lower section of the outside portion of the utensil is formed with a curved “W” shaped bottom (lower) end section **636**. The utensil further includes a flexible middle portion **642** having an upper elongate section **644** and a “U” shaped (two prong-tine) bottom (lower) end section **646**, **648**. The upper elongate section of the middle portion is attached to the lower end section **626** of the handle **620** and is positioned within the elongate outside section **634** of the outside portion. The elongate section of the outside portion and the elongate section of the middle portion are articulated or curved at the juncture **560** with the lower rectangular sections, thereby creating a spatula-shaped utensil. The lower “U” shaped middle section fits within the curved cutouts of the lower “W” shaped outside section to form a spatula that resembles a fork.

The spatula-shaped utensil **600** of the present invention is further configured with a fulcrum (finger) tab **650** configured on the upper elongate section **644** of the middle portion **642** proximate the lower end portion **626** of the handle **620**. A first portion **652** of the fulcrum extends from the top (upper) side of the elongate middle portion of the utensil and a second portion **654** of the fulcrum extends from the bottom (lower) side of the elongate middle portion. Depressing the fulcrum bends the elongate middle portion and moves (separates) the middle portion’s lower “U” shaped section (tines) **646**, **648** away from the lower “W” shaped section **636** of the outside portion **632** of the utensil. The top portion of the fulcrum may be configured to engage upper elongate sections of the outside portion **632** to lock the separated position of the “W” shaped

section and the “U” shaped section. The fulcrum tab bottom section may further be configured with a slot **655** to sit on the edge of a frying pan (skillet) or other cooking utensil.

Referring now to FIGS. **7A** to **7D**, an alternative embodiment of the utensil **700** of the present invention is configured with a handle **720** having a top (upper) end portion **724** and a bottom (lower) end portion **726**. The upper end of the handle may be configured with a circular hole (cutout) **722** useful for hanging the utensil from a hook. The lower end of the handle may be configured with grooves or slots **725**, **727** in the front side and in the backside of the handle to sit on the edge of a frying pan (skillet) or other cooking utensil. Alternatively, one or more grooves (slots) may encircle the entire handle to allow the utensil to be hung or placed in any orientation or position.

The bottom (lower) body portion **730** of the utensil **700** includes two overlapping (“L” shaped) portions **732**, **742** extending from the lower end portion of the handle. The first upper overlapping portion **732** includes an upper elongate section **734** connected to and extending downwards (away) from the handle. The upper overlapping portion of the utensil is formed with an “L” shaped bottom (lower) end section **736** that is configured with a horizontal extending section **738**. A fulcrum (finger) tab **754** is configured on the backside of the upper elongate section **734** proximate the lower end portion **726** of the handle **720** (FIG. **7B**). The lower end section may be configured with one or more elongated horizontal slits **737**, so as to provide liquid drainage from the utensil. Similarly, the lower end section **746** of the lower overlapping portion **742** may be configured with one or more elongated horizontal slits **747**, so as to provide liquid drainage from the utensil. In addition, the juncture (wall) at the upper elongate sections **734**, **744** may be configured with a gap to allow fluid drainage through the middle of the utensil.

The lower overlapping portion **742** of the utensil **700** further includes a second upper elongate section **744** connected to and extending downwards (away) from the handle lower end portion **726**. The “L” shaped bottom (lower) end section **746** of the lower overlapping portion is configured with a horizontal extending section **748** that is positioned adjacent the horizontal extending section **738** in the “L” shaped bottom section **736** of the upper overlapping portion **732**. A fulcrum (finger) tab **752** is configured on the top side of the upper elongate section of the lower overlapping portion proximate the lower end portion **726** of the handle **720** (FIG. **7C**). As shown in FIG. **7D**, the fulcrum tabs **752**, **754** on the elongate portions of the utensil body **730** are used to separate the upper overlapping portion from the lower overlapping portion so that the horizontal extending sections **738**, **748** may be used grip food or other items between the horizontal extending sections of the overlapping portions. The fulcrum tabs may be configured to lock the upper overlapping portion and the lower overlapping portion on an ‘open’ position such that the horizontal extending sections are separated.

The fork-shaped utensils may be configured in a variety of dimensions, depending upon the purpose. For example, for use a barbeque (grilling) utensil, the handle may have a length in the range of seventeen (17) centimeters to thirty-two (32) centimeters and preferably twenty-five (25) centimeters. The handle may have a width in the range of eighteen (18) millimeters to forty (40) millimeters and preferably thirty-four (34) millimeters. The body portion forming the base of the fork may have a length in the range of ten (10) centimeters to twenty (20) centimeters and preferably fifteen (15) centimeters. The body portion may have a width in the range of fifty (50) millimeters to eighty (80) millimeters and preferably seventy-two (72) millimeters. The tines of the fork may have

a length in the range of six (6) centimeters to fourteen (14) centimeters and preferably ten and five tenths (10.5) centimeters. The tines of the fork may have a width in the range of thirty (30) millimeters to forty (40) millimeters and preferably thirty-six and five tenths (36.5) millimeters.

The spatula-shaped utensils may be configured in a variety of dimensions, depending upon the purpose. For example, for use a barbecue (grilling) utensil, the handle may have a length in the range of eighteen (18) centimeters to thirty-three (33) centimeters and preferably twenty-five and three tenths (25.3) centimeters. The handle may have a width in the range of twenty-eight (28) millimeters to forty (40) millimeters and preferably thirty-four (34) millimeters. The outer body portion of the spatula may have a length in the range of eight (8) centimeters to fourteen (14) centimeters and preferably ten and sixteen one-hundredths (10.16) centimeters. The outer body portion of the spatula may have a width in the range of ninety (90) millimeters to one hundred and twenty (120) millimeters and preferably one hundred and one and six tenths (101.6) millimeters. The inner body portion of the spatula may have a length in the range of seven (7) centimeters to fourteen (14) centimeters and preferably nine and five-tenths (9.5) centimeters. The inner body portion of the spatula may have a width in the range of thirty-eight (38) millimeters to fifty (50) millimeters and preferably forty-four (44) millimeters.

The "L"-shaped utensil may be configured in a variety of dimensions, depending upon the purpose. For example, for use a barbecue (grilling) utensil, the handle may have a length in the range of ten (10) centimeters to seventeen (17) centimeters and preferably twelve and five tenths (12.5) centimeters. The handle may have a width in the range of twenty-seven (27) millimeters to thirty-five (35) millimeters and preferably thirty-one and six tenths (31.6) millimeters. Each "L"-shaped portion of the spatula may have a length in the range of twelve (12) centimeters to eighteen (18) centimeters and preferably seventeen and three tenths (17.3) centimeters. Each "L"-shaped portion of the spatula may have a width in the range of ninety (90) millimeters to one hundred and five (105) millimeters and preferably ninety-nine and three tenths (98.3) millimeters.

The above-described embodiments have been provided by way of example, and the present invention is not limited to these examples. Multiple variations and modification to the disclosed embodiments will occur, to the extent not mutually exclusive, to those skilled in the art upon consideration of the foregoing description. While certain aspects of the invention have been illustrated and described herein in terms of its use with specific materials, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that the utensil can be made from many materials not specifically discussed herein. Further, particular sizes and dimensions of the utensil have been described herein and are provided as examples only. Additionally, other combinations, omissions, substitutions and modifications will be apparent to the skilled artisan in view of the disclosure herein. Accordingly, the present invention is not intended to be limited by the disclosed embodiments, but is to be defined by reference to the appended claims.

I claim:

1. An apparatus, comprising:
a single piece handle with a branched lower end thereof
that includes two elongated side portions and a flexible

middle portion that is positioned between the side portions;

the side portions and the middle portion are continuations of the branching lower end of the handle, with the middle portion physically separated from the side portions;

the side portions and the middle portion share a common plane when the middle portion is at a rest position;

a tab configured on the middle portion and formed to bend the middle portion out of the shared common plane and away from adjacent side portions, with the middle portion flexing near the branching lower end of the handle.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the middle portion is configured with two or more elongated portions.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the tab is configured to move between the elongated side portions so as to lock the position of the middle portion relative to the position of the side portions.

4. An apparatus, comprising;

a single piece handle with a lower end,

a side portion having a first elongate section extending from the handle and first rectangular section formed with a central open portion; and

a middle portion having a second elongate section extending from the handle and having a second rectangular section positioned within the central open portion of the first rectangular section of the side portion; and

a tab configured on the second elongate section and formed to bend the middle portion away from side portion;

the side portions and the middle portion share a common plane when the middle portion is at a rest position.

5. The apparatus of claim 4, further comprising a spring mechanism configured in the first elongate section and in the second elongate section so as to bias the second lower rectangular section within the central open portion of the first lower rectangular section.

6. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the tab is configured to lock the position of the second rectangular section relative to the position of the first rectangular section.

7. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the first rectangular section is configured with at least one elongated slit, and wherein the second rectangular section is configured with at least one elongated slit.

8. A utensil, comprising

a single piece handle having rigid lateral portions and a flexible middle portion;

the lateral portions and the middle portion are continuations of a lower end of the handle, with the middle portion physically separated from the lateral portions;

the lateral portions and the middle portion share a common plane when the middle portion is at a rest position; and

a tab configured on a side of the middle portion and formed to bend the middle portion out of the shared common plane and away from lateral portions, with the middle portion flexing near the lower end of the handle.

9. The utensil as set forth in claim 8, wherein:

the lateral portions have a single distal end section, forming an opening within which the middle portion rests and through which the middle portion moves.

* * * * *